Elements of An Effective Approach to Male Involvement

*Developed by Men’s Resources International*

**Foundational Beliefs and Values**

1. **Men are naturally loving, caring and sensitive with women, children and other men. Men are not born violent and abusive.**
   A belief in men’s capacity for compassion is an essential foundation for effectively engaging men. Although this compassion is often buried by social norms and expectations, men can remember and reclaim these abilities. Affirming men’s desire for positive masculinity, loving relationships, and healthy families reinforces these aspects of men’s nature and provides powerful incentives for engagement.

2. **Men are trained to be masculine in ways that lead to violence against women and children.**
   The socialization of males into rigid, stereotypical, dehumanizing and violent forms of masculinity is one root cause of men’s violence against women. Understanding male socialization enables both men and women to develop a critical analysis about men’s experiences and behaviors, and more effective strategies for outreach and engagement.

3. **Men’s perpetration of violence is caused by the combination of trauma and privilege.**
   Recognizing that males are victimized by violence, especially as children, validates the full reality of men’s experiences with violence, encourages a healing process for men, and reveals that men are natural allies with women in preventing violence. Understanding that men are both privileged and damaged is central to developing effective male engagement strategies.

4. **Men can play a critical role as partners with women and agents of social change.**
   Women have led the way in exposing and challenging gender-based violence and gender inequality. Many men are ready to learn how to join them in this work. Affirming the importance of men in ending violence against women and children, and the value of positive male role models encourages men to get involved.
Educational Methodologies

5. **Actively engage men and women in dialogue with each other about their own experiences.**
   MRI’s male involvement trainings use a participatory, experiential approach to create an environment where personal experiences, feelings and perceptions are shared. Group interactions are used as opportunities to witness gender dynamics and practice cross-gender dialogue and gender relations skills.

6. **Speak to the head, the heart and the spirit.**
   Training activities balance the presentation and discussion of information and ideas, with reflection and sharing about emotional experiences, and the inspiration of vision and connection.

7. **Help men recognize the full range of violent behavior.**
   Identify relevant examples of violence representing subtle to extreme forms. Explore how violence can be physical, emotional, financial, systemic, etc.

8. **Teach men to listen to women.**
   Give men explicit instruction on how to listen with attention and compassion but without judgment, advice, or interruptions. Identify appropriate verbal and non-verbal ways of expressing comprehension, engagement, connection, and support. Create opportunities for men and women to practice listening and being listened to.

9. **Teach men to break the silence about their own experiences with violence.**
   A code of silence often surrounds violent experiences, and men have learned to be afraid to speak out. One of the most powerful things men can do is create an environment that supports men talking together about their own experiences, confronting others about their attitudes and behaviors, and taking a stand publicly in our communities.

Key Considerations in Program Development

10. **Engage the help of an experienced consultant in the early stages of planning.**
    Years of experience working with women and women’s groups, may not be sufficient. Staff may need additional skills and resources to successfully and safely engage men.

11. **Engage women from the beginning as advisors, participants, and monitors for the male involvement initiative.**
    The creation of a male involvement project has practical and psychological impacts on existing GBV program staff and participants, who are often mostly
women. Because of their key roles in program leadership, community connections, and service delivery, it is vital to have their understanding, acceptance and investment in any initiative for engaging men. Addressing women’s fears and concerns, and deliberately cultivating trust and accountability with women staff and community members must be a priority throughout the project.

12. **Provide a model and careful guidance for integrating male involvement into existing GBV and other women’s programs**

The overall program mission (women’s safety and empowerment), and the programs for women (survivor services and empowerment activities) remain the same. The male involvement initiative adds programs for men (awareness programs and ally training), and programs for women and men together (cross-gender dialogue, community interventions and initiatives, collaborative campaigns). The mixed gender programs will require both men and women to learn skills for communicating and working together.

13. **Develop men’s engagement initiatives in communities where women’s groups are already strong.**

Community-based women’s groups can provide feedback and advice, assistance in outreach to men, an opportunity for men to practice the skills of listening to women and supporting women’s leadership, and a basis for powerful collective actions.
14. **Form community-based men’s action groups.**
Men’s action groups provide an effective structure for awareness-raising and community mobilization. The group setting provides a support system for changes in attitudes and behaviors, a focal point for recruitment of other men, a vehicle for leadership development, and a collective resource for collaboration with women.

15. **Provide ongoing training, supervision and technical assistance for a core group of community-based men and women.**
Because male involvement is a long-term social change process, skills and leadership of men and women from the community must be cultivated and supported. Ideally, joint training is conducted for men’s and women’s action groups in male socialization, cross-gender dialogue, and working together for gender equality. Women’s and men’s groups are supporting in meeting both separately and together.

16. **Plan collective actions**
The true power of this process is revealed when women and men are able to take action together. Actions can range from responding to individuals and supporting families in the community to organizing country-wide awareness and advocacy campaigns.

17. **Develop awareness and campaign materials that reflect images of positive masculinity and men’s engagement as partners with women.**
Be sensitive to the level of awareness and literacy of the target audience. Use group input to create messaging that is culturally relevant, peer-to-peer, and offers positive choices rather than accusations.

18. **Establish monitoring and evaluation systems.**
Regular interviews and surveys with the women’s groups, men’s groups and community leaders provide feedback about the male involvement initiative. Documentation of activities and testimonials of community members give evidence of program impacts.

**Challenges**

- **Women’s misgivings about the process of engaging men**
  Understandably, women may feel defensive and mistrustful about involving men in what has traditionally been considered a women’s issue. Fear about men taking over or competing with women for attention and resources can generate resistance.

- **Balancing support and challenge to men**
  While cultivating compassion, understanding and empowerment for men around their own experiences of violence, it is also necessary to hold men accountable for their behavior and help them recognize their unfair status of power and privilege.
Members of men’s action groups are likely to reveal their own patterns of violence and abuse as they become more aware and learn to break the silence. Balancing support and accountability within the group, and establishing guidelines for group member behavior is an ongoing challenge.

- **Re-playing traditional gender roles in meetings of women and men**
  Despite significant changes and good intentions, patterns of gender inequality, power and control will continue to influence program participants, both in interpersonal dynamics and group attitudes and behaviors.

- **Dealing with perpetrators**
  Groups will have to balance values of accountability and compassion, while negotiating safety issues, legal systems, and the impulse for a strong and immediate intervention. This is often made more difficult by the lack of social consequences for perpetrators of gender-based violence.

- **Maintaining and sustaining motivation and engagement**
  International NGOs frequently assume that community members will naturally want to be involved in projects that seek to improve the community at large, yet have no real economic gains for participants.

  In impoverished communities, men may want or expect a stipend or other material benefits for their participation. While this is understandable, it is important that men recognize the imbalance of financial opportunities for men vs. women as a legitimate reason that women’s groups may take priority for funding.